

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
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FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6801

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, PINT, HA
SUBJ: STIRRINGS IN HAITI LABOR MOVEMENT

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. SINCE THE CELEBRATIONS OF THE 20TH ANNI-
VERSARY OF DUVALIERIST RULE IN HAITI ON SEPTEMBER 22, HAITIAN
WORKERS HAVE VENTED THEIR GRIEVANCES IN A MANNER UNPRECEDENTED
IN RECENT YEARS. THEY HAVE BEEN EMBOLDENED BY THE PRESIDENT'S
PROMISES TO LIBERALIZE HAITIAN SOCIETY AND BY HIS DECLARATION
OF AN INCREASE IN THE MINIMUM WAGE (PAP3773). BRIEF STRIKES,
AND A COUPLY OF DEMONSTRATIONS IN FRONT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL
PALACE HAVE OBLIGED THE PRESIDENT TO INTERVENE PERSONALLY IN
SOME CASES AND HAS CAUSED THE GOVERNMENT TO ADMONISH WORKERS
TO USE THE ARBITRATION PROCEDURES OF THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
AFFAIRS. THIS ACTIVITY ON THE LABOR FRONT IS SYMPTOMATIC OF
THE CHANGES TAKING PLACE IN HAITI BUT DOES NOT PRESAGE ANY
SUCH REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE AS THE EMERGENCE OF A STRONG AND
INDEPENDENT TRADE UNION MOVEMENT. END SUMMARY.

2. ON SEPTEMBER 22, THE TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS FATHER'S
ELECTION, PRESIDENT JEAN-CLAUDE DUVALIER MADE NATIONAL
RECONCILIATION AND "THE UNITY OF THE HAITIAN FAMILY" THE
THEME OF HIS SPEECH MARKING THE OCCASION. USING THE TERM
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"JEAN-CLAUDISM" TO DIFFERENTIATE HIS POLICIES FROM THOSE OF
HIS FATHER, HE PLEDGED HIMSELF TO A MORE OPEN AND
DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY. HE CALLED FOR PROFESSIONALS TO SPEND MORE
TIME ASSISTING THE RURAL MASSES AND HE DECLARED THE FIRST IN-
CREASE IN THE MINIMUM WAGE IN NEARLY THREE YEARS. IN AN
APPEAL TO OVERSEAS HAITIANS, HE SAID THE ENEMIES OF THE PAST
WOULD BE WELCOMED BACK WITHOUT BITTERNESS AND WITHOUT HATRED

IF THEY WISHED TO RETURN TO WORK FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR COUNTRY (PAP 3594).

3. THE PRESIDENT'S SPEECH AND THE LIBERATION THE DAY BEFORE OF ALL REMAINING POLITICAL PRISONERS DID NOT COME OUT OF THE BLUE BUT ARE PART OF A CONTINUING PROCESS OF GRADUAL LIBERALIZATION WHICH BEGAN SHORTLY AFTER JEAN-CLAUDE SUCCEEDED HIS FATHER IN 1971. THE PACE OF CHANGE HAS QUICKENED, HOWEVER, IN THE PAST YEAR AND THE EVENTS OF SEPTEMBER HAVE STIMULATED NOT ONLY LABOR UNREST BUT A SPATE OF OUTSPOKEN ARTICLES IN THE MEDIA AND EVEN SPECULATION ABOUT SOME FREEDOM OF CHOICE IN THE FORTHCOMING LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS.

4. THE LABOR ACTIVITY STARTED IN SEPTEMBER WHEN THE TAXI DRIVERS ON THE ROUTE LINKING HILL-SUBURD PETIONVILLE WITH PORT AU PRINCE STRUCK TO PROTEST AN EDICT BY THE PETIONVILLE POLICE LIMITING THE NUMBER OF PICKUP POINTS. THE DRIVERS APPEALED TO PRESIDENT DUVALIER AND THE EDICT WAS QUICKLY RESCINDED ON HIS ORDER. NEXT THE CHAUFFEUR-GUIDES, WHO SERVE PORT AU PRINCE TOURISTS, DEMONSTRATED IN FRONT OF THE PALACE FOR INCREASED RATES WHICH WERE QUICKLY ACCORDED.

5. SHORTLY THEREAFTER THE WORKERS AT THE GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED HAITIAN-AMERICAN SUGAR COMPANY (HASCO) DEMANDED AUDIENCE WITH THE INTERIOR MINISTER TO PROTEST THE MINISTRY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS REFUSAL TO ALLOW THEM TO CHANGE THEIR UNPOPULAR UNION PRESIDENT. AFTER VIROROUS DEBATE THE WORKERS WON THE RIGHT TO HOLD AN ELECTION AND THE APPOINTED INCUMBENT WAS NOT ALLOWED TO RIG THE RESULTS. A NEW UNION PRESIDENT, ELECTED ABOUT A WEEK LATER, PLEDGED TO DEFEND THE WORKER'S INTERESTS. HASCO, IN WHICH THE DUVALIER FAMILY REPORTEDLY HAS A LARGE FINANCIAL INTEREST, IS CONSIDERED A BELLWEATHER IN INTERNAL POLITICS. HASCO WORKERS PLAYED A LEADING ROLE IN THE FALL OF PRESIDENT PAUL MAGLOIRE IN 1956.

6. NEXT THE WORKERS OF CIMENT D'HAITI EMULATED THEIR HASCO BRETHREN AND DECIDED TO REPLACE THEIR UNION PRESIDENT, WHO THEY CLAIMED WAS IN THE COMPANY'S POCKET, WITH ONE OF THEIR OWN CHOOSING. A PROVISIONAL COMMITTEE WAS IMMEDIATELY SUBSTITUTED FOR THE PREVIOUS LEADERSHIP AND CONFIRMED IN OFFICE BY UNION VOTE ABOUT THREE WEEKS LATER. INTERESTINGLY, THE DEBATE ACCOMPANYING THESE ELECTIONS WAS PUBLICLY BROADCAST AND NUMEROUS CRITICAL STATEMENTS WERE MADE ABOUT THE NEO-COLONIALIST ATTITUDE OF CIMENT D'HAITI'S PREDOMINANTLY FRENCH MANAGEMENT. CIMENT D'HAITI WAS THE SCENE OF THE LAST MAJOR LABOR UNREST IN MAY 1976 WHEN ITS WORKERS STUCK FOR IMPROVED PAY AND WERE BROKEN BY ONE-SIDED GOVERNMENT ARBITRA-

TION OF THEIR DEMANDS. A TRAGIC RESULT OF THAT STRIKE WAS THE MYSTERIOUS AND YET UNRESOLVED MURDER OF THE YOUNG REPORTER WHO COVERED THE AFFAIR FOR OUTSPOKEN WEEKLY LE PETIT SAMEDI SOIR (76 PAP 1472 AND A51 OF 5/24/76).

7. IN ADDITION TO EVENTS CITED ABOVE THERE HAVE BEEN A SERIES OF LESSER CONFRONTATIONS BETWEEN WORKERS AND EMPLOYERS OVER THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW MINIMUM WAGE GUIDELINES. THESE HAVE USUALLY BEEN RESOLVED WITHOUT STRIKES BUT CONSTRUCTION WORKERS DID WALK OFF THE JOB IN LATE OCTOBER IN A WAGE DISPUTE IN LES CAYES WITH SANGAMO-BARTER, AN AMERICAN FIRM WITH A CONTRACT FROM THE INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK TO BUILD A SECTION OF THE "SOUTH ROAD."

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8. MOST RECENTLY, ON NOVEMBER 11, MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES IN THE CITY OF PORT AU PRINCE REFUSED TO ACCEPT PAYMENT AT LESS THAN THE NEW MINIMUM WAGE. THE ACTION OF THESE STREETSWEEPERS WAS WELL-TIMED--THE MORNING AFTER ONE OF THE HEAVIEST RAINS OF THE YEAR HAD DEPOSITED TONS OF MUD AND SEWAGE IN THE LOWLYING STREETS OF DOWNTOWN PORT AU PRINCE.

9. THE GOVERNMENT HAS REACTED EDGILY TO THESE SUCCESSIVE MANIFESTATIONS OF WORKER INDEPENDENCE. TEAMS OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES HAVE VISITED MANY OF THE TRANSFORMATION INDUSTRY PLANTS IN THE PORT AU PRINCE AREA TO STRESS THAT THE PRESIDENT'S WORDS OF SEPTEMBER 22 ARE NOT A LICENSE FOR UNDISCIPLINED ACTIVITY--DISPUTES ARE STILL EXPECTED TO BE SUBMITTED TO THE ARBITRATION PROCEDURES OF THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS. THESE ARBITRATION PROCEDURES, HOWEVER, ARE CREAKY AND USUALLY BIASED IN FAVOR OF THE EMPLOYER DESPITE THE

MINISTER OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS' PATERNALISTIC CONCERN FOR THE WELFARE OF "INEXPERIENCED AND UNSOPHISTICATED" WORKERS.

10. COMMENT. THE ACTIVITIES CITED ABOVE ARE INDICATIVE OF THE PROGRESSIVELY MORE RELAXED NATURE OF JEAN-CLAUDE DUVALIER'S REGIME, AND THE SPUNK OF RELATIVELY PRIVILEGED WAGE EMPLOYEES. WE DO NOT, HOWEVER, ANTICIPATE THAT THESE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DEVELOPMENTS PRESAGE THE EARLY EMERGENCE OF A STRONG AND INDEPENDENT LABOR MOVEMENT. WHILE JEAN-CLAUDE DUVALIER SEEK IMPROVEMENTS IN LABOR CONDITIONS, THEY CANNOT TOLERATE ACTIVITIES WHICH APPEAR TO THREATEN THE SECURITY OF THE GOVERNMENT. JOINING THEM IN THIS BRAKING EFFORT ARE:
A) THE CONSERVATIVE OLD GUARD "DINOSAURS" WHO LOOK SUSPICIOUSLY ON ANY LIBERALIZATION, B) THE EMPLOYERS, C) THE HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE, WHICH IMPOSES PRACTICAL LIMITS ON THE PRESSURES WORKERS CAN BRING TO BEAR ON THEIR EMPLOYERS.

11. HOWEVER, IN OUR JUDGEMENT, THERE HAS BEEN SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS, AT LEAST IN TERMS OF HAITIAN REALITIES. OUR BEST POLICY WOULD SEEM TO BE TO CONTINUE TO QUIETLY SUPPORT CHANGE TOWARDS A MORE DEMOCRATIC TRADE UNION MOVEMENT. THE POWERFUL ULTRA CONSERVATIVE FACTION TAKE THE POSITION THAT THE US WILL NEVER BE SATISFIED NO MATTER WHAT IS DONE AND IS ONLY LOOKING FOR A PRETEXT TO REACT AGAINST HAITI. ANY ACTION WHICH WOULD STRENGTHEN THEIR HANDS WOULD SET BACK PROGRESS AND SHOULD BE AVOIDED.
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